(a) whether his attention has been drawn to a report published in the 'Economic Times', Bombay of 27th November, 1994 under the caption "Jaffer factor delays Konkan Railways" and about the differences with the KRC Chairman and Managing Director;

(b) if so, what are the facts and to what extent these differences have delayed the execution of the Konkan Railway Project;

(c) what is the present position about the execution of the Rs. 1700 crores project for construction of a railway line between Mangalore and Roha in the Konkan coast;

(d) what was the target date for the completion of this project and at what cost;

(e) when this project is now likely to be completed and what will be the total time and cost overruns and what are the reasons for delay in the completion of the project; and

(f) what steps the Goverament have taken or propose to take to ensure early completion of this project?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI C. K. JAFFER SHARIEF): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Certain reports have appeared in the Press relating to award of a contract by the Konkan Railway Corporation Ltd., for providing optic fibre communication cable on the project without taking prior approval of the Government. Since this work was not envisaged initially in the Konkan Railway Project Estimate, the incurrence of liabilities on this contract has, therefore, been objected to by the Administrative Ministry. The Government has since appointed a committee of three experts for advising it on the cost-effective appropriate communication network. This issue is not likely to delay the execution of the project.

(c) An overall weighted progress of about 80% has been achieved in the construction of Railway line between Roha and Mangalore.

(d) When the Konkan Railway took over the project work in 1990, the target for completion was fixed as October, 1994 at a cost of Rs. 1043 crores.

(e) The entire Konkan Railway is scheduled to be opened for goods traffic by June 95 and for passenger traffic by December, 1995. The estimated cost of the project has since been revised to Rs. 1751 crores net and Rs. 1784 crores gross (at 1993-94 price level) which is under examination of the Government. The shifting of the target from October, 1994 to June, 1995 has been caused by the problems experienced at the sites/locations where tunnelling is in progress.

(f) The progress of the project is constantly being monitored on day-to-day basis and the Board of Konkan Railway Corporation has also been adequately strengthened.

Repairing National Highways between Tuticorin and Rameshwaram

2451. SHRI JAGDISH PRASAD MATHUR: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the National Highway connecting Tuticorin and Rameswaram known as the East Coast Road is in very bad shape causing hardships to pilgrims visiting Rameswaram and the salt manufacturers who have salt pans on both sides of the road;

(b) whether it is a fact that the Salt Manufacturers Association and other public representatives have approached the authorities to repair the road; and

(c) if so, the reasons for not taking any steps to repair this Highway?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI JAGDISH TYTLER): (a) to (c) Constitutionally, the Government of India are primarily concerned with the development and maintenance of National Highways only, and for all other Roads, the respective State Governments are essentially responsible for their construction/development etc. Since the road in question in Tamil Nadu is forming a part of the State Road network, the Government of Tamil Nadu are, therefore, basically concerned for undertaking improvemental works on it.

Sethu Samundram Project

2452. SHRI JAGDISH PRASAD MATHUR: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Sethu Samundram Project conceived long ago, which is important for coastal shipping has been finally dropped;

(b) whether Government also realise its great strategic importance for defence; and

(c) if so, why not effective steps have yet been taken to implement the project, despite repeated proposals made since 1955 and before?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI JAGDISH TYTLER): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) The need for this project has been examined by this Ministry